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ABSTRACT

From education's present emphasis, a student would logically conclude that he needs to know a lot about what happened hundreds of years ago, a little about what is happening now, and nothing about the future. Actually, just the opposite is true. The speed of change makes it likely that most occupations known today will, within a dozen years, be replaced by jobs not now existing. The necessity for constant retraining will change the nature of education from a single process concluding with graduation to a recurring, life-long enterprise. The obsolescence of knowledge will require teaching fewer facts and more analytical and decision-making skills, as well as the ability to cope with change. Decision-making authority in the schools will have to be placed closer to the action, in the hands of principals, whose students will be doing less and less of their learning in traditional school environments. Superintendents, on the other hand, will become community education managers overseeing a wide range of specialized educational teams. (Author/PGD)

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THE FUTURE IS NOW

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS CONVENTION

APRIL 4, 1978

DR. NOLAN ESTES

Anthropologist and linguist Felix Moos said: "Thinking about the future is like thinking about getting old. It isn't particularly pleasing, but it happens anyway."

When we think about the future sometimes I think we're like the little old lady who went to the post office to mail a package. She asked the clerk to weigh the package for fear she hadn't used enough stamps. The clerk weighed it and then told her she had actually used too many.

She said, "Oh, dear. I do hope it won't go too far."

Well, I think we're a lot like that about the future. After reading books such as *1984* and *Future Shock*, we feel like gritting our teeth and just hoping against hope that the future won't go too far.

As is so often the case, we will find it helpful to look back at where we've been to help us envision more clearly where we're going. And a fascinating thought to me is that, in some ways, we may move forward to some of the approaches used in the past, although with a new twist.

Think back to the little red school house. It was one large room with children of all ages. The older kids helped the teacher teach the younger ones. Today, what do we do? We call it open area schools, multi-age grouping and cross-age tutoring, but a lot of the same types of things are happening—with a slightly different twist.

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The Past

Until fairly recent years, the past crept forward into the present and repeated itself in the future. In a relatively unchanging setting, the most sensible way to prepare a child was to arm him with the skills of the past—for they were precisely the same skills he would need in the future.

Fathers handed down to their sons all sorts of practical techniques. Knowledge was transmitted through the family, religious institutions and apprenticeships. Learner and teacher were dispersed throughout the entire community.

Think back as recently as the turn of the century to a largely rural America. A barefoot boy might observe the full range of his occupational expectations just by walking beside his father at the time of plowing, by watching the farmers, blacksmiths or tradesmen who did business in his hometown. While he went to the little red schoolhouse to learn readin', writin' and 'rithmetic, much of his learning was still in the home and the church.

Effect of Industrialism

The Industrial Revolution changed much of this. It demanded skills that neither family nor church knew much about. Time was regulated not by the cycle of the sun and moon, but by the factory whistle and the clock. Pre-adapting children for a new world of repetitive indoor toil, smoke, noise, machines, crowded living conditions and collective discipline became the business of the school. As a matter of fact, the educational system in its very structure, simulated this new world. Masses of students or the raw material were processed by teachers or workers in a centrally located

school or factory. Children marched from place to place and sat in assigned stations. Bells rang to announce changes of time.

As a matter of fact, the most criticized features of education today—the regimentation, lack of individualization, rigid systems of seating, grouping, grading, the authoritarian role of the teacher are precisely those things that made mass public education so effective as an instrument of adaptation for its place and time.

Effect of Present Emphasis

The school child did not simply learn facts that he could use later on; he lived, as well as learned, a way of life modeled after the one he would lead in the future. Faced with conditions that had never before existed, men had to devote increasing energy to understanding the present. As a result, the focus of education began to shift away from the past and toward the present.

What do we do with youngsters in this regard today?

We carefully help each student position himself in space. Maps, charts, and globes all help pinpoint his spatial location. Not only do we help locate him with respect to his city, his region or his country, we even try to explain the spatial relationship of the earth to the rest of the solar system, and indeed, to the entire universe.

But when it comes to locating the child in time, however, we tend to play a cruel trick on him. He studies ancient Greece, the rise of feudalism, the French Revolution and his nation's past. He is peppered with endless accounts of wars, revolutions and upheavals, each one of which he is expected to dutifully tag with its appropriate date in the past.

At some point we even introduce him to current events, and a really enterprising teacher may even ask him to watch the evening news on television. We offer him a thin sliver of the present. But then time stops. The school is silent about tomorrow. Time comes racing to an abrupt halt.

The student is focused backward instead of forward. The future, banned as it were from the classroom, is banned from his consciousness as well. It is as though there were no future.

With out present emphasis, a student would logically conclude that he needs to know a lot about what happened hundreds of years ago, a little about what is happening now and nothing about this future.

Actually just the opposite is true if we are to prepare young people to live in a drastically different world in the future.

Occupations

For example, in ten years, Lisa Allen, a second grader at Dallas' Lakewood Elementary School, will have a very important decision to make—what choice to make for an occupation. At age 28, she will face another important decision—what career to pursue. Again at age 38, it is entirely possible that once more she will have to decide on another new career. It is estimated that future job requirements will cause the phasing out of a typical specified skill about once every 10 years. This will require that adults be retrained for the evolved job description. It is estimated that in 1990, only one out of 10 of today's kindergarten students will enter an occupation which can be identified today.

Implications for Public Education

The implications for public education in the single area of occupations are numerous.

1. First of all, rapid changes will mean that every person, regardless of age, will remain a student and learner most of his life. There will be no graduation, as a finality, to a person's educational career. Returning to school, several times, as an adult, will be the usual rather than the unusual thing to do. Provision for life-long education on a plug-in/plug-out basis will have to be made. In fact, I believe:

   (1) That the constant retraining sequence will become a status symbol for people.

   (2) That the ability to be retrained will be equated with one's youthfulness, and, hence, attractiveness.

2. Secondly, schools will become community centers or just "The Center" with persons of all ages studying and learning there. The complex will become a one-stop shopping center for the delivery of all human services. School personnel can see the total picture of the needs of a family and carefully coordinate and orchestrate human services to meet individual needs, aspirations and requirements.

A look at what's happening to our population points out the need. While the lowered birthrate is bringing about a decline in student population—1.5% at the elementary level nationwide this year and about 1% at the high school level—the percentage of elderly is rising rapidly. For example, a recent newspaper article estimated that the number of senior citizens in Dallas will increase from the present 11.6% of the population to 13% by 1985. While medical science is enabling people to live longer, little has been done

to make those years productive, and that must be changed. By involving senior citizens with the school and giving them opportunities to learn new things, I believe we can fulfill a real need to help the aging continue to lead a productive life and keep a young outlook.

An interesting step in that direction in Dallas is an elementary school in which we had some empty classrooms due to our desegregation order. The city of Dallas has leased eight classrooms and is providing a recreation program for senior citizens. We also have a tuition program for 4-year olds located there. In that particular center then we have ages from 4 - 90. The students as well as the older people are benefiting from the contact.

3. The structure of the buildings, will change significantly. H. B. Gores predicts that, by the year 2001, roofs will no longer be opaque and defensive, designed principally to shed the rain. Instead, it will be a sensitive membrane facing upward to the sky, the better to absorb or reject, to capture or reflect, the mass of energy that surrounds it. The entire building shell and landscaping will be designed so that it lives with nature rather than defies it. Within the building, changes will be dramatic. Spaces will be tentative, their configurations subject to change at will and at once.

Buildings will house more than just classrooms. One day we will have a high rise at Crozier, a school located in downtown Dallas. At the very top will be a hotel. The middle floors will contain business offices, while the lower floors will be devoted to classrooms. Students will merely have to ride a few floors up on the elevator to observe real-world transactions and get practical experience in business and hotel management. And the

beauty of it is that a recently formed educational foundation will build it for us. It won't cost Dallas taxpayers a red cent.

4. The community will become the classroom in a very real sense. In fact, the schoolhouse of the future will actually, once again, return us to the past, when education took place in non-specialized environments—the marketplace, the workshop, the farm, the home. In fact, the classroom will be used as a support system for outside learning.

5. Education will return to the home. Actually it never left. As levels of education rise, more and more parents are intellectually equipped to assume some responsibilities now delegated to the schools. With the move toward knowledge-based industry and the increase of leisure, we can anticipate a small but significant tendency for highly educated parents to pull their children at least partway out of the public education system, offering them home instruction instead.

Parents and students will sign short-term "learning contracts" with the nearby school, committing them to teach-learn certain courses or course modules. Students might continue going to school for social and athletic activities or for subjects they cannot learn on their own or under the tutelage of parents or family friends. A computer assisted instruction program at a Dallas elementary school is charting the future in this area. I envision a shoe box computer in each home.

Parents will more and more play a key role in the child's learning in education. I am convinced that every parent wants the very best for his or her child. Many of them simply do not know what to do. Many with little education themselves feel too inferior to even try. With the conclusive evidence presented by research of the importance of the home on the child's

progress, schools will take more responsibility for giving parents specifics and methods for helping their children.

Our Partners in Education program in Dallas is a giant step in that direction. This program involves parents significantly with their child's learning, through parent-teacher conferences, a parenting monitoring process, and specific recommended learning activities for parents to use with their children at home. The Dallas Public Library has become a real part of the partnership by developing packets of reading materials for children at various levels. The business community has also gotten into the act with most businesses releasing parents from work for parental conferences.

6. While teaching will still be an occupation, the role of the teacher will change drastically. In fact, it is estimated that as much as 50 percent of what a teacher does today will be abandoned in most schools by the 21st century. No longer will students spend only 31 minutes of an hour class period or only 3 1/2 hours out of a 6-hour day on school learning as Bill Webster's report showed. Basically, teachers will become learning coordinators. It will become their responsibility to coordinate the learning process for each pupil in their groups on a truly individual basis.

A teacher will no longer be a purveyor of information. Indeed he or she must, instead see that students learn how to learn. Since knowledge will grow increasingly perishable, the teacher must keep in mind that today's fact may very well become tomorrow's misinformation. Tomorrow's teacher must, therefore, teach not merely data, but ways to manipulate it. Students must learn how to discard old ideas, how and when to replace them.

Psychologist Herbert Gerjuoy of the Human Resources Research Organization phrases it simply: "The new education must teach the individual how to classify and reclassify information, how to evaluate its veracity, how to change categories when necessary, how to move from the concrete to the abstract and back, how to look at problems from a new direction—how to teach himself tomorrow's illiterate will not be the man who can't read; he will be the man who has not learned how to learn."

7. TOMORROW'S PRINCIPAL

Challenges brought about by future changes will probably impact the school principal more significantly than any other educational position.

The '70s have been trying times for school principals—what with legal rulings, federal and state guidelines, employee unrest, social change and demographic challenges. I have been amazed at the manner in which our principals have stayed on top of these challenges and brought our schools through perilous times. In fact, I would have to say that 95 percent of the credit for the success we've experienced in Dallas is due to the leadership and outstanding expertise of school principals.

If the public school is to remain a viable institution in the year 2001, it will also be due to the efforts and capabilities of the school principal. This will require a new model with the key to success being a management team. In fact, faced with the challenges of today and tomorrow, that's the only way I believe public education will survive.

Think with me for a moment about the impact of some of these problems.

First of all are the power blocs that seek to control but without any accountability for their actions. These come from various groups—students, teachers, parents, business and politicians. The result is that these power

blocs have wormed, weasled and wiggled away management's perogative and stripped away control over areas of the principal's responsibility. As a result, the school principal, too often, has been bulldozed into a quagmire of a no-win, dingy dungeon.

The problem has been accentuated by increasing demands on the dollar. The result is that elected officials and superintendents are suffering from educational myopia and tunnel vision brought about by ballot box bursitis. The result has been that management rights have been bartered away bit by bit, leaving the principal high and dry.

It has become increasingly difficult for the principal to be the educational statesman, the instructional leader and the management expert the principal should be and is expected to be. Think with me about the principal's job and how the authority of the principal in these areas has been sabotaged.

Certainly an important responsibility of the principal is to match student learning style with appropriate teaching style. However, evaluation procedures and seniority provisions often render the principal ineffective in this area.

A second major responsibility is matching an appropriate program with student ability and need. Here again, union curriculum committees, the scope of bargaining influence and bumping privileges have emasculated the principal.

A third major area of responsibility is allocation of money in the most cost-effective manner to obtain the maximum educational impact. The tragedy is that regulation of class size and teacher demands reduce the chances of orchestration for the greatest potential.

Let me remind, however, that when the principal loses his or her management rights, the superintendent and the board of education lose their ability to manage the corporation. Complex bargaining contracts destroy the opportunity to be creative and responsive to individual student needs. Faced with these constraints, principals should not be surprised that the Gallup Poll shows that public confidence in education is waning.

In order to turn things around, I believe that school management in the future must be based on a true leadership team with school principals becoming the legislative component. The principal can and will contribute significantly if they are provided a forum.

In the decision-making process, the principal or the legislative component will weigh propositions, make proposals and enact policies. The executive component or the superintendent will exercise three options—veto, partially accept or fully accept. The board of education would, of course, take final action.

The key is sharing power with decisions made where the knowledge is versus where the power is.

8. SUPERINTENDENT OF THE FUTURE

What about the school superintendent? I predict that the superintendent of schools will no longer exist. It will be an extinct species. Instead, this person will become the manager of learning services for the entire community. As such the scope of responsibilities will broaden significantly. As I have already pointed out, education will become a lifetime process. With technological advances becoming more and more rapid, occupations will be fleeting things in comparison with what they are today. Schools will

have to be ahead of the times in terms of skill training rather than lagging behind.

In order to provide the forward vision which will be a necessity, the manager of learning services for the community must create a council of the future for the citizens under his or her educational leadership. This would consist of teams of men and women devoted to probing the future in the interest of the present. Granted no one holds a monopoly on insight into tomorrow, but his group could project "assumed futures" and define coherent educational responses to them. Specialists are, of course, definitely needed here. Students also must be involved. After all, they're the ones who will invent and inhabit the future. Young people must help lead the way. In fact, we should be looking to students to help lead the way at this moment.

9. THE CURRICULUM

Lastly, while I could spend the rest of the afternoon speculating on the future and what we will be teaching in the year 2001, I would like to discuss briefly with you three very important areas which will have tremendous impact on the skills young people must have.

(1) First of all, schools will have to teach young people to be superior decision makers. Through experiences that enhance their self-knowledge, schools must help students clarify their own values and enable them to understand the consequences of their choices.

The problem of choice—how to decide among competing alternatives—will become increasingly a major problem.

Magnet schools can assist students in becoming superior decision makers. I say that for several reasons. Students must decide to chance the unknown—to trade a familiar, comfortable environment for the unknown. In making that

decision, they must carefully weigh all the advantages and disadvantages. They must leave old ties and make new friends. They must take an inventory of their own interests and abilities and decide it is worthwhile to invest their time and effort in a particular field.

Magnet schools assist students in weighing all factors in making a decision. They get a broad picture of a particular field. After studying in that area half a day, every day for an entire year, they get to know their talents, their abilities, their potential in that field. They also learn it's o.k. to change your mind, to find out at a very early age that perhaps they weren't as interested or were not as well adapted to a certain field as they thought. They realize that there is no guilt attached to changing your mind by selecting another field.

(2) The second thing I would like to mention is the unique roll which will be played by progress in communications and information.

- One of the first stages of this progress will be the creation of a single global telephone and videophone system.
- Further in the future a universal information system will give everyone access at any given moment to the contents of any book, magazine or fact that has ever been published via miniature computer terminals. Unlike television, this system will give each person maximum freedom of choice and will require individual activity.
- Thus individualized instruction can be provided in homes as well as classrooms.
- Listening will surpass reading as the major skill required by society.
- Reading will remain fairly basic, but will not determine the learning success of a child in school, as it now does.

All of us are aware of the immense impact television has had on the lives of all of us, particularly children. I saw an interesting statistic the other day—94 percent of American homes have television sets, and only 91 percent have bathtubs. This means that more brains are getting washed than anything else!

Even William Shakespeare had a few words to say about summer reruns on TV: "The evil men do oft lives after them."

(3) The third area on which the school of the future, and in truth, the school today should be focusing is giving students the skills to cope with change. Living successfully in the year 2001 will require men and women

- who can make critical judgments,
- who can weave their way through novel environments,
- who are quick to spot new relationships in the rapidly changing reality, "have the future in their bones."

One of our prime objectives must become increasing the individual's cope-ability—the speed and economy with which he can adapt to continual change. And the faster the rate of change. The more attention must be devoted to discerning the pattern of future events.

- It is no longer sufficient for Johnny to understand the past.
- It is not even enough for him to understand the present, for the here-and-now environment will soon vanish.
- Johnny must learn to make repeated, probabilistic, increasingly long-range assumptions about the future.

A key to coping will be developing the habit of anticipation.

Conclusion

I like the motto of the science fiction writers of America—"The future isn't what it used to be." And never was.

As Toffler said: "All education springs from some image of the future. If the image of the future held by a society is grossly inaccurate, its education system will betray its youth."

As leaders in your school, you shape the future.

Our young people are this nation's number one natural resource. It is up to you to see that number one natural resource is appropriately prepared to use its talents and abilities.

Many of the things we need can wait—the child cannot. Today his bones are being formed; his blood is being made; his sensitivities developed. We can't say to him "tomorrow." His name is today.

The future is now.